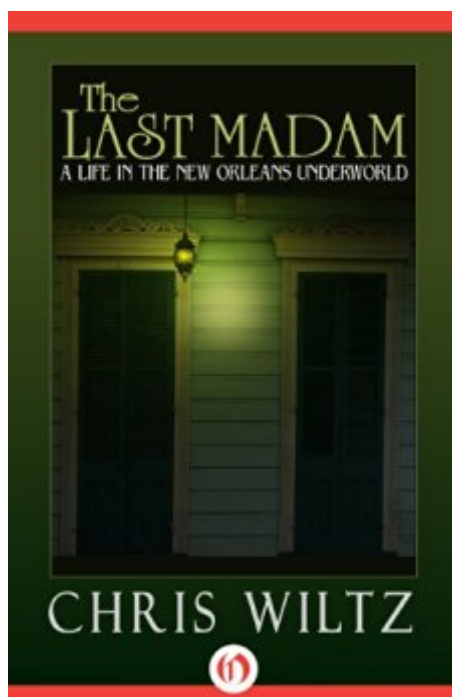


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The Last Madam: A Life In The New Orleans Underworld



Synopsis

The âœœeraunchy, hilarious, and thrillingâœ• true story of the incomparable Norma Wallace, proprietor of a notorious 1920s New Orleans brothel (NPR). Norma Wallace grew up fast. In 1916, at fifteen years old, she went to work as a streetwalker in New Orleansâœ™ French Quarter. By the 1920s, she was a âœœelandladyâœ•âœ”or, more precisely, the madam of what became one of the cityâœ™s most lavish brothels. It was frequented by politicians, movie stars, gangsters, and even the notoriously corrupt police force. But Wallace acquired more than just repeat customers. There were friends, lovers .Â . and also enemies. Â Wallaceâœ™s romantic interests ran the gamut from a bootlegger who shot her during a fight to a famed bandleader to the boy next door, thirty-nine years her junior, who became her fifth husband. She knew all of the Crescent Cityâœ™s dirty little secrets, and used them to protect her own interestsâœ”she never got so much as a traffic ticket, until the early 1960s, when District Attorney Jim Garrison decided to clean up vice and corruption. After a jail stay, Wallace went legitimate as successfully as she had gone criminal, with a lucrative restaurant businessâœ”but it was love that would undo her in the end. Â The Last Madam combines original research with Wallaceâœ™s personal memoirs, bringing to life an era in New Orleans history rife with charm and decadence, resurrecting âœœa secret world, like those uncovered by Luc Sante and James Ellroyâœ• (Publishers Weekly). It reveals the colorful, unforgettable woman who reigned as an underworld queen and âœœcapture[s] perfectly the essential, earthy complexity of the most fascinating city on this continentâœ• (Robert Olen Butler). Â

Book Information

File Size: 1416 KB

Print Length: 268 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media (July 1, 2014)

Publication Date: July 1, 2014

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00KQZY3F2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #6,087 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #3 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > State & Local > South #11 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Criminals #16 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Crime & Criminals

Customer Reviews

I was a young investigative reporter living in the French Quarter in the era Christine Wiltz writes about, and I saw it all -- the political payoffs, the crooked cops, the upscale whores and the spavined sluts, the overstuffed and pompous city fathers, the pimps and touts and junkies. What a rich mix it was! Wiltz, a native Orleanian, put the odor of pralines and boiled crawfish and "buster" crabs back in my nostrils for the first time in 50 years. She's caught the era perfectly, and with considerable writing skill. "The Last Madame" is as authentic as an open grave in the St. Louis Cemetery.

When the subject of this book shrugs off being shot in the ankle because she got a 7-carat diamond ring out of the affair, you know this is no ordinary person. Norma Wallace was one of the last Madams' of New Orleans. For more than 4 decades she ran her various houses that were the locations where young men were brought for their introduction to the carnal pleasures of adulthood, where actresses and actors frequently paid visits, and where a good percentage of politicians and law enforcement officers also passed some time. The book is not a glorification of what was at times a brutal existence. The book and the behavior of many is entertaining, but when reality becomes a bit too easy, incidents that were absolutely horrible brought reality back with great intensity. This is a story of a woman who knew what she wanted at a very young age, and who by the 1920's was making 100,000 per year. To survive and thrive during changes in political landscapes she was not only an exceedingly shrewd businesswoman, she was also a grand manipulator of politicians, and law enforcement. She managed to fit in 5 marriages, a relationship with a nationally known gangster, and the creation of a wildly successful restaurant business in with all her other interests. This woman was one of the original practitioners of multitasking. All of this came with a price, the same man who was a gangster might try to kill her one night, her jewelry that was valued at 70,000 decades ago and which she wore daily would make her a target. And for 40 years there was always some new rookie cop or politician that wanted to make his mark by closing her down. The story is wild, amazing and true; the read is almost as fast paced as her life.

New Orleans is one of the most visited cities in the USA. Even the casual visitor has been told the stories of prostitution and corruption in the majestic French Quarter. The story of Norma Wallace based in part on her audio taped autobiography gives the present day reader the best look at what this life was really like. The writer is convincing, by naming names and places, that the world's oldest profession was almost respectable, even in the last half of the 20th century. The research done to write this book is amazing. The opinion you form of Norma, by the end of the book, is surprising. A good book and a must if you are familiar with New Orleans

A fabulous book with wonderful descriptions of New Orleans. Norma is, of course, legendary, so it was a privilege to finally learn the details of her fascinating life. It kept me on my toes the entire time I was reading it. How amazing that you can know how everything turns out at the end and still not be able to put it down until you're finished.

The colorful life of "landlady" Norma Wallace is laid out here in great detail -- her thoughts, shortcomings and enviable business sense, and the obsession with the beauty of youth that eventually becomes her downfall. Novelist Christine Wiltz has meticulously researched her subject, so readers not only come away with a full understanding about New Orleans' last real madam, they also get a real feel of the N'awlins of the early to mid 20th century. A great read before or during a trip to the Big Easy -- and an equally great read even if you've never set foot in the Crescent City.

This book had all the makings of a true page turner - a madam, her girls, political corruption, a hot steamy setting and more, it just didn't read like a page turner. Yes, there were parts that held me captive on the edge of my seat waiting to see what happened, but then there were vast sections that were about as interesting to read as the telephone book. Gleaned from her own taped memoirs and other previously written articles as well as interviews with friends and acquaintances the professional life of Norma Wallace, New Orleans' last madam, seemed rather lack luster. With so much raw material, what went wrong? Oddly the later parts of the book, after Ms. Wallace's retirement from the business seemed to hold much more interest for me than those dealing with her working days. From a historical perspective I think this was a good read as Ms. Wallace's life in the French Quarter spanned quite a long period of time. This is not the stuff you learn about in Louisiana history. I learned a lot more about our past mayors from this book than I ever did in a history class. I particularly liked that addresses of the houses where she was a "landlady" were given. I will definitely spend some afternoon in the near future scouring the French Quarter for

these addresses. All in all it was a fairly decent book. I think it will hold particular interest for New Orleanians like myself, but would not be as appealing to the rest of the general population.

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